

# PRESS RELEASE

## NORMAN POLICE DEPARTMENT

Due to recent drought conditions, residents have reported seeing more wild animals around their homes than usual. Norman Animal Welfare records indicate that they are picking up about the same numbers of wildlife as in previous years. With the onset of winter, however, many animals will begin actively foraging for food. One of the most visible are skunks, who carry the rabies virus. With the public reporting more sightings than normal, Animal Welfare wants to provide some information on rabies.

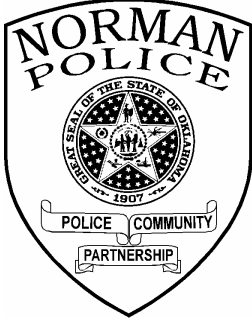
Rabies is considered a “reportable Disease” in Oklahoma. Human rabies is very rare in the United States, but rabies, in some wild animal species, is common. The virus is found in the brain, spinal fluid, and saliva of infected animals. Transmission occurs when these fluids enter the body through a bite, fresh opening of the skin that has not scabbed over, or mucous membrane (eyes, lining of the nose, or mouth). The following are not considered exposures to rabies--being scratched by the animal, contact with blood, urine, feces, dried saliva, petting or touching the hair of a rabid animal, or touching surfaces the animal had contacted.

The rabies viruses found in Oklahoma includes those adapted to skunk and bats, and they can infect all warm-blooded mammals, including dogs, cats, horses, and cattle. Skunks are the major animal reservoir of rabies in our state. Each year, a small number of bats, horses, cattle, cats, dogs and other mammals identified with rabies. To test an animal for rabies, the brain tissue must be undamaged, but no approved procedure exists to test for rabies in a live animal.

It is important to remember to act as a responsible pet owner and keep your pets current on their rabies vaccinations. Oklahoma law requires all dogs, cats, and ferrets to receive immunization against rabies **by or under the supervision of a veterinarian** by the time the animal reaches four months old. Experts recommended that horses and valuable livestock also receive rabies vaccinations.

The Oklahoma State Department of Health recommends the following precautions to protect your pets and yourself:

- Keep dogs and cats close to home. Dogs should be leashed or within a fenced-in area when outside. Keep cats in at night and not allowed them to roam freely.
- If your pet comes into direct contact with a skunk or bat, contact your veterinarian as soon as possible.
- Do not keep wild animals as pets.
- Discourage wild animals from inhabiting areas close to residences. Do not leave pet food outdoors for long periods, keep trash tightly sealed, keep brush piles cleared away from buildings, and seal chimneys.
- Have any bats found inside your home, whether alive or dead, tested for rabies.



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The Norman Animal Welfare Center has several services they offer to address wildlife issues.

1. Live traps – Live traps can be checked out at the shelter for your usage.
2. Trap pickup – If you catch something in the trap, all you have to do is call and an Animal Welfare Officer will come and pickup the trap. (Special note – if your trap a skunk the trap must be covered for an officer to respond.)
3. Disposal of Nuisance wildlife – You can also bring an animal that you have trapped in your own personal trap and shelter staff will take care of it for you.

Do not leave your pet's food outside! If you are feeding your cats outside then please, feed them on a raised surface. Cats can easily jump to the top of a table but skunks cannot.

For more information, please visit the Oklahoma State department of Health's website at [http://www.ok.gov/health/Disease, Prevention, Preparedness/Acute Disease Service/Disease Information/Rabies.html](http://www.ok.gov/health/Disease_Prevention_Preparedness/Acute_Disease_Service/Disease_Information/Rabies.html)